

Honor Lifelong Giving

Whenever I notice a particularly long obituary in this paper, I take the time to read the details of the person's life and accomplishments. Their story brings to life their marriage, children, military experience and professional background. I often feel cheated that I didn't get to know the person or perhaps that I did know them but missed out on some special facet of their life. Over the past two years, I've had the privilege of getting to know Lyle and Jean Burgess, a couple who live in Hearthstone Court, an independent living residence of Hearthstone Communities. The Burgesses got acquainted with Hearthstone Communities in 1964 while members of Hillside Free Methodist Church in Evanston, Illinois. They were so impressed with the work being done for children and older adults that they decided to make annual donations to the charitable work being done in Woodstock, Illinois. Over the ensuing thirty-six (36) years, this practice of philanthropy has supported a ministry that has grown and thrived in the Woodstock community since 1886.

The Burgesses were honored recently by Hearthstone Communities at a reception at the Waverly Ballroom where a consecutive giving society was created in their name, the Lyle W. & Jean E. Burgess Society. Asked to say a few words, Lyle was apologetic in asserting that they might have missed a donation in a particular year or two but then made up for it with multiple gifts on another occasion. I haven't met many people who exhibit the class and generous spirit as the Burgesses. Another surprise for me was learning to appreciate Lyle's wry sense of humor. As he recounted their journey from Evanston to Woodstock, Lyle told a spell-bound audience how he and Jean were able to resume their courtship at Hearthstone Court. The unspoken bond of love between the couple was a privilege to witness and was certainly an event one doesn't experience very often.

Lyle and Jean Burgess are self-proclaimed ordinary people who have lived their lives with dignity and respect for each other. Their faithful generosity far eclipses the dollar value of their contributions. They are the foundations that undergird the work of one of Woodstock's oldest and finest institutions. We are all better for having them live in our community.